

Medvednica Fortresses

As vital witnesses to our past, fortresses were once the centres of power that shaped the nation's political, economic, and cultural identity. As complex architectural ensembles, they also represent the most significant construction achievements of their time. They therefore deserve our care and efforts to preserve them for future generations. From the very beginnings of mountaineering, the fortresses of Zagreb Mountain have captivated outdoor enthusiasts exploring Medvednica.

Medvedgrad

On Mali Plazur, a peak on the southern part of Medvednica, lies the picturesque medieval Medvedgrad. It was built in the 13th century, at the time of the Tatar invasion that devastated Gradec and left Zagreb Cathedral in ruins.

The Medvedgrad fortress is strategically well positioned and, for its time, very well constructed. Its importance and longevity are evidenced by the list of its owners and residents, which includes some of the most prominent Croatian noble families: the Babonići, Karlovići, Frankopani, and Zrinski, as well as the Erdődy and Counts of Celje. At times it was in the hands of the Bishops of Zagreb or notable individuals such as Duke Coloman, Ban Mikac, and Margrave George of Brandenburg. Distinguished figures such as the humanist Janus Pannonius (Ivan Česmički) resided there, and it was occasionally owned by the royal court itself during the reigns of Kings Béla IV, Sigismund of Luxembourg, and Matthias Corvinus.

The lords of Medvedgrad sustained themselves through estates at the foot of Medvednica (Šestine, Blizna, Dedići, etc.), while a significant portion of their income was derived from ferry tolls across the Sava River. Not infrequently, they filled their treasuries and storehouses by plundering nearby villages, and at times even attacked Zagreb itself. The conflict between the last lord of Medvedgrad, Stjepko Gregorijanec, and the citizens of Zagreb was described by August Šenoa in his novel "The Goldsmith's Treasure".

Severely damaged by a major earthquake in 1590, Medvedgrad was abandoned to the elements and left to fall into gradual decay. Since 1979, the fortress has undergone systematic archaeological research, wall conservation, and partial reconstruction. In 1994, the "Homeland Altar," a work by sculptor Kuzma Kovačić, was erected beneath the southern tower, where an eternal flame burns in honor of all Croatian heroes.

Today, Medvedgrad remains one of the most visited destinations on Medvednica. Following restoration and the opening of the Medvedgrad Visitor Centre, it has become a place to learn about the history of this exceptional cultural monument as well as the natural values of Medvednica. We recommend visiting the Medvedgrad Visitor Centre. Medvedgrad can be reached via hiking trail 12.



Ruins of Medvedgrad
c. 1925 / MGZ



Medvedgrad

Tihomir Stančec, 2019 / MGZ



Ruins of Susedgrad

Milena Bušić, 2025



Ruins of Susedgrad
c. 1924 / MGZ

Susedgrad

Of the once powerful fortress of Susedgrad, only ruins remain today, gradually overgrown and eroded by lush vegetation. It was built in the 13th century at a strategic point overlooking a crossing over the Sava River. Below it lies a historic junction where roads from Slavonia, Zagorje, and Slovenia have intersected for millennia.

The earliest owners mentioned are members of the old Slavonian nobility of Hungarian origin, the Aga (Ača) family, followed by well-known families such as the Babonići, Frankopani, Keglevići, Erdődy, and the military commander Ivan Katzianer.

One of its most famous owners was Franjo Tahy, whose name became synonymous with cruelty and oppression. For nearly a decade, conflicts among the nobility persisted, eventually drawing in the peasantry—whose involvement led these events to be remembered as the Peasants' Revolt. These events, marked by violence, tragedy, and complex relationships, remain preserved in historical records and oral tradition.

The remains of the fortress can be reached by a walk through the forest, entered from the Peasant Revolt Alley in Podsused. From there, hiking trail 101 leads toward the Kameni svati mountain hut.

Zelingrad

On the eastern slopes of Medvednica lie the ruins of the medieval fortress of Zelingrad. Constructed in the 13th century following the Tatar invasion, the fortress first appears in historical records in 1295, at which time it housed a royal garrison.

Zelingrad is the most recognizable witness to the turbulent medieval history of the Zelina foothills. In the centuries that followed its founding, it played a vital strategic role, particularly during the period of Ottoman incursions. Zelingrad was, among others, ruled by noble families, including the Bičkele—notorious for their violence—and the Kerečenji, who distinguished themselves in battles against the Ottomans. For a certain period, it was also owned by the Croatian-Hungarian king John Zápolya.

After losing its military importance, the fortress decayed for centuries, hidden in the forest. Since the turn of the 21st century, the Sveti Ivan Zelina Museum has led restoration efforts, with systematic archaeological research and conservation work currently underway at the site.